



Handling Argumentative Students

Sometimes students express disagreement in an overly aggressive manner. Occasionally a student will even be hostile, angry, and argumentative, challenging your authority or your ability to teach the class. Here are some tips for dealing with argumentative students and challenges to your authority:

- Listen calmly, carefully, and respectfully to the student's comments.
- Speak deliberately in a slow, calm voice in order to lower the tension in the room and set a reasonable tone for discussion.
- Ask clarifying questions that help to define the issue. If the student's challenge is related to the course subject matter, you can use this as a teachable moment. Otherwise arrange a time outside of class to discuss the issue.
- If the student challenges you on assignments or exam scores, calmly explain your reasons for grading the questions the way you did. If necessary, keep the assignment to look at privately to collect your thoughts before rendering a decision the next day. Providing clear rubrics or expectations for assignments ahead of time can help avoid these arguments.
- If a student displays a consistently negative attitude, try to learn what the problem is as soon as possible. Ask the student to stay after class, or meet with you outside of class, and respectfully ask questions to learn more about the student's argumentative nature.
- Instead of verbally expressing their arguments have students put their thoughts in writing.
- Do not take the student's attitude or hostility personally.

Remember, argumentative students are often seeking attention and power. Therefore,

- don't grab their hook in front of class.
- avoid and defuse the situation by using tips from the above list.

Expressing opinions appropriately is an important communication tool so

- help students recognize when they are arguing by using a pre-determined signal or cue.
- help students learn to convey their opinions in an appropriate and respectful manner.
- model appropriate ways of disagreeing and discussing conflicting opinions.

You may engage with the student in a non-argumentative manner by using phrases such as

- "I understand how you feel, however..."
- "I'm sorry you feel this way but..."
- "You don't need to speak disrespectfully to get your point across."
- "Stating your opinions in a pleasant, respectful manner will give you a better chance of being heard."